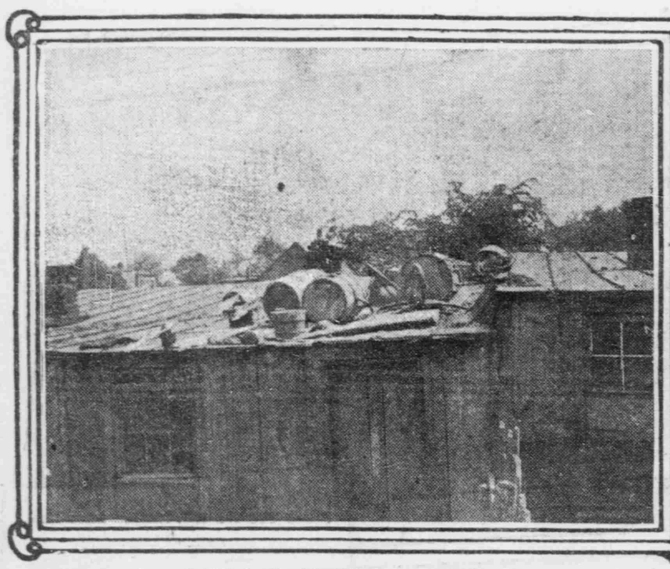
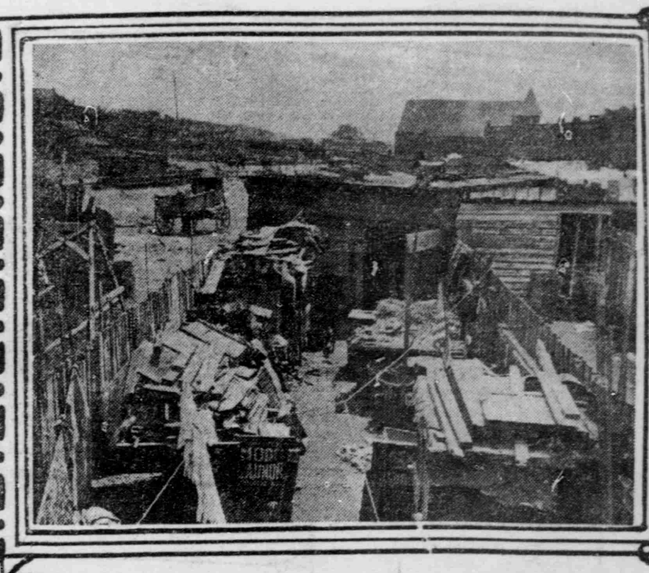
VISITING NURSES DO NOBLE WORK OF CHARITY AMONG POOR

WATCHING FOR THE VISITING NURSE.



Where There Were Several Sick in the Same Room the Visiting Nurse Advised Transferring the Overflow of Household Goods to the Roof.

A Typhoid Patient in One Corner and a Family Laundry in the Other.



The Visiting Nurse Finds Some of Her Patients Living in Veritable Junk Shops

Society Sends These Messengers of Good Cheer Into the Lowly Homes of the Suffering and Distressed of Washington.

ONE of the most beautiful institutions of Washington, and yet one but little known among the generous-minded as yet, is the Instructive Visiting Nurse Society, a regularly incorporated institution conceived and supported by a few wealthy and benevolent women of the city. The object of the society is to provide trained nurses to visit and nurse the poor in their homes and to instruct them in the care of the sick.

The work is intended to supplement, not to duplicate or interfere with, the proper function of hospitals. Ordinarily only such cases are attended as hospitals do not receive or where the circumstances of particular patients require home treatment.

It is intended for patients who are not able to go daily to the public dispensaries or hospitals, and who either from inclination or necessity must be treated at home.

Negroes Are Treated.

Among the class which forms the most frequent patrons of the free nurse are negroes of the very poorest and most ignorant class, many of whom think a trip to the hospital in an ambulance is simply a journey to the terrible "Night Doctor," from whose clutches no black person escapes.

Then it was found that there were hundreds of old chronic cases which could not be treated because the patients were not subjects for the hospitals, and yet which were woefully neglected and often not treated at all at home.

Duties of the Nurse.

The visiting nurse is the close ally of the physician to the poor whose magnificent work helps to save thousands of lives during a year. Just as every physician to the poor reports each morning at the nearest police precinct for his daily list of patients, new and old, so does the trained nurse report, and, from the roster prepared for the purpose, follow up and take instructions from the doctor. They also take distressing cases for which there is no money to provide a special nurse, from other physicians, and take the cases reported by the Associated Charities, with which they work in perfect harmony.

Each nurse has her own district, and the seven nurses paid by the society are under a superintending nurse who has in charge all the supplies and to whom each nurse must report. Through this head nurse the seven nurses obtain the ice tickets, each little regularly printed ticket being good for 5 cents' worth of ice, her pint and quart milk tickets, which also call for one or two eggs, as the case may demand, and in the winter for broth, as well as her general supplies.

The headquarters of the superintending nurse is in the building with the Associated Charities, and though the two organizations are distinctly separate, they work together to fine advantage.

The number of nurses is quite inadequate to the demand, and were the society able to supply a dozen more they would all be kept busy in attending to the sick and in instructing mothers and fathers how to administer medicine and follow out the directions of the doctor. The nurses are often overworked, and when one thinks of a trained nurse of no greater experience or ability getting from rich patients $100 a month and board, and then of the sacrificing woman, who, for love of humanity, accepts the small pay for ceaseless hours of toil, it is not hard to discover why the poor and afflicted learn to love these ministering angels until they cling to their dresses and cry each time they leave.

How Equipped.

Each visit of a nurse to a poor patient costs the society 37½ cents, and often nurses walk for fifteen and twenty blocks to reach patients in out of the way places, who, without their aid, would die in lingering agony.

After a physician to the poor discovers that his patient is not able to buy the necessary diet, and lack of proper diet is the cause of more sickness than any one other thing, he advises the nurse, and she procures ice tickets and a blanket for wrapping up the ice, as an ice chest in the homes of most of the patients would be as useless as a wine closet. To these are added tickets good for a pint or quart of milk, and one or two eggs, the tickets being revenue at any nearby dairy, for just the cost of the articles mentioned.

With these two important wants met, the nurse is tolerably equipped for her duties. In addition to her supply of tickets, dealt out in sufficient numbers for each day, so there will not be first a feast and then a famine, she carries wash clothes, soap, towels, and the simplest of drugs, as well as alcohol for rubbing her patients.

The Baby Nurse.

The "Baby Nurse," as Miss Seiling is called, has more than her hands full, and in addition to her sixty patients the first of the week, each day brought dozens of new cases, until she has lengthened her hours and is worked far beyond her strength. She is successful with babies, and they love her. Her department is rather the most interesting of all, and through the charity of the more fortunate in life she is well equipped for her work.

The Christ Child Society provides her with the cunningest little baby wardrobes, composed of six slips, six skirts, diapers, night gowns, and other necessary garments for the babies who are due to arrive in the world and to remain in the same condition in which they present themselves but for the work of these thoughtful women.

These little wardrobes are actually given the baby to keep, but the supplies from the nurses' closet, which belongs to the society, are always loaned.

When the free nurses first started out, they found that their work lay among the poorest, most neglected and often degraded negroes and white people, and that their patients lay upon beds of unclean rags. Then there were other cases where there were some supplies of household linens but not enough to meet the demand when sickness came. This same trouble occurred with the sleeping clothes of the patients.

The Nurse's Office.

As a result the offices of the visiting nurse—generally a table and closet in the office of a district agent of the Associated Charities—are fully equipped with all necessary supplies for the nurse's "traveling" bag or medicine chest, which she carries with her on her round of visits. There is a closet containing such things as simple restoratives, bandages, vaseline, antiseptics, cotton, quinine, and laxatives.

The larger supply closet contains sheets, pillow cases, blankets, pads, heavy bandages, water-bags, ice-bags, and sleeping garments, all of which are freely given to patients with the stipulation that they are not to dispose of them, and are to return the clothes to them nicely laundered when the patient for whom they were intended has recovered.

Many cases present themselves where a family has a means of support, but not adequate for paying a nurse to remain in the house. From those who can afford it, a small fee is collected, which, all told, last year amounted to $21.20, not a source of revenue for the society, to be sure, but sufficient to make some family feel independent in paying 15 or 20 cents for the visit of a nurse or in buying their own medicine.

One Day With the Nurse.

The nurse leads a hurried existence, and passes swiftly from one case of distress to another for eight hours of the day, often, when necessary, working long hours overtime to relieve some urgent case.

A nurse's schedule for the day with the thermometer resting at 97 degrees, reads like this: Arrived at office at 8:30 a. m. After attending to the wants of those in waiting, and she never fails to find some one there who wishes a wound dressed or to consult her on a case, or to secure some promised supply, such as sputum cup, needed by a tubercular patient; or bandages, vaseline, or some other small necessity promised at the visit of the day before, she equips her satchel with all necessities, and starts out.

Her first call was upon a family where there were two patients—a child of twenty-two months with entero colitis, whom she found feverish and restless, and to whom she gave a bath and irrigation as ordered by the visiting physician. She also directed the mother how to prepare barley water and other nourishment for the child. The other patient, an older sister, with acute articular rheumatism, had to be sponged, her bed changed, arm and leg wrapped in cotton, and various articles loaned from the nurse's supplies.

By the time this family was made comfortable and the mother given new courage to nurse her sick and attend to her family, it was time for the nurse to report at Police Headquarters again. She only found one new case, though at this season nurses not infrequently get as many as a dozen new cases in a day.

She next called upon a little boy some blocks away who had typhoid fever. The mother was willing, helpful and intelligent, and while she needed the nurse to give her assurance, carried out all the instructions implicitly. The nurse recorded the temperature and pulse for the doctor, ordered a bath, and made the mother some necessary loans from the closet.

More Distress.

Three blocks away was another little typhoid patient, who was so bright and cheerful that the nurse felt repaid for all her labors. Here she recorded pulse and temperature, and made the mother some loans from that resourceful cupboard.

Next time she stopped, it was to call upon a little girl twenty months old who was feverish and fretful though only suffering from some slight childish irregularity. She relieved her and gave the mother instructions.

Then she went to see a mother and new baby, both of whom she found doing well. After that she dressed a bad ulcer, treated a case of tuberculosis, and again made various loans.

None of these were so very heartrending, but her next call was almost beyond description. She found a patient who had typhoid fever with serious complications, who had lain upon a narrow cot for five weeks. A bed was made downstairs, and the patient moved and relieved.

The Basque Family.

The nurse knows her cases as No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, and so on, but each case writes itself indelibly on her mind, and she often finds misery and sorrow enough to last her for hours, but there is the humorous side, too, and the nurse who discovered and relieved the "Basque Family," as she termed them, laughed at the funny picture they presented, long hours after her trying day's work was done.

The nurse's patient in the "Basque Family" was black, poor, old, neglected, and sick. She looked for the world like a dried walnut with jet eyes. She had a "powful" sore on her leg, and though the nurse decided that it was getting better, after several dressings, in none of which the old woman would lend a helping hand, she declared she was no better, and that the nurse did not know what she was talking about.

In the Basque family was a mother, grandmother, and more pickaninnies to the square inch than fleas in a peck of Georgia sand. They called them the Basque family, because "de ladies what I washes fuh' mosely gives me dese sort o' sacks," and as she had neither time nor inclination to make them over, nor was there material for it, they furnished a covering for the upper parts of the bodies of this great family of little colored children. Some basques had postillions, some full skirts, some plain, some Zouave effects, some with vests, some with big sleeves, little sleeves, and no sleeves at all, but one for every child. When the sleeves were too long they were rolled up, and when too big about the body they were lapped over and pinned, but basques they all wore until it seemed that the women for whom the mother washed had nothing at all in their wardrobes but old basques, in which there was not three inches of uncut material to work over. These grotesque garments hung over a mere handful of dirty rags that formed the other part of the children's clothing. Some places neatness could be taught, and it was a part of the free nurse's duty to do it, but with the "Basque family" it was utterly hopeless, and the nurse confined her efforts to the helpless old scold, whose leg she dressed.

One Was Starving.

Once the nurse found a baby starving to death. She had often, in fact nearly always, found them hungry, but this one was starving to death in Washington, and not many blocks from where great dinner parties are given every night to a large number of guests.

It was a negro baby, as most of the very distressing cases, and in addition to its hunger, its little body was being racked with chills and fever. Its mother went to work every day and left it with another mother who had as many children as had the "Basque family." As in that miserable shanty it was one grand race for existence anyway, the stronger children won out, and the little invalid gave up her few crusts of bread with never a word of complaint.

Before we had time to recover from the real shock of finding the starving child, whom the nurse made comfortable as possible on short notice, with copious notes for what she was to do on the morrow, we were on our way to the police station for more trouble. In speaking of a diet of beef tea and other nourishing things to be given the sick child, I asked if the other children would not continue to consume the sick child's food. "Not much," merrily responded the nurse, "you know there are tricks in all trades, and I shall just put beef tea and quinine in well proportioned doses in a spoon and invite the little gourmands up to taste it. One sip around will fix them.

Jack of All Trades.

The afternoon brought more sore legs, more rheumatism, more malaria, more dirt, more well-deserved poverty, more wages of crime; but along the way there were rare glimpses of a promise of better things. That was where the teachings of the gentle, patient nurse had taken root, and were springing into new life. One place a horny-handed carpenter was taking care of his old mother nights and morning, and while all he did was with a woman's tenderness, there was a long interval during the day when but for the call of the nurse the dear, patient little old lady might have suffered for a woman's care.

Most of our patients were ill from sleepless nights occasioned by carousing neighbors and the sort of microbes that love a bed-fellow. The latter did not even blush to attack a sick patient in the light of day and before the nurse's eyes, so sometimes she administered a dose to the bed and the patient at one and the same time—only, of course, of a different sort. Once the nurse nailed a piece of a soap box over a hole in the wall to keep the rain off her patient; twice she resorted to a nearby store in haste for food, and once she carried an old tin bucket around the corner for coal. This was not exactly the prescribed duty of the nurse, but it was "In His Name."

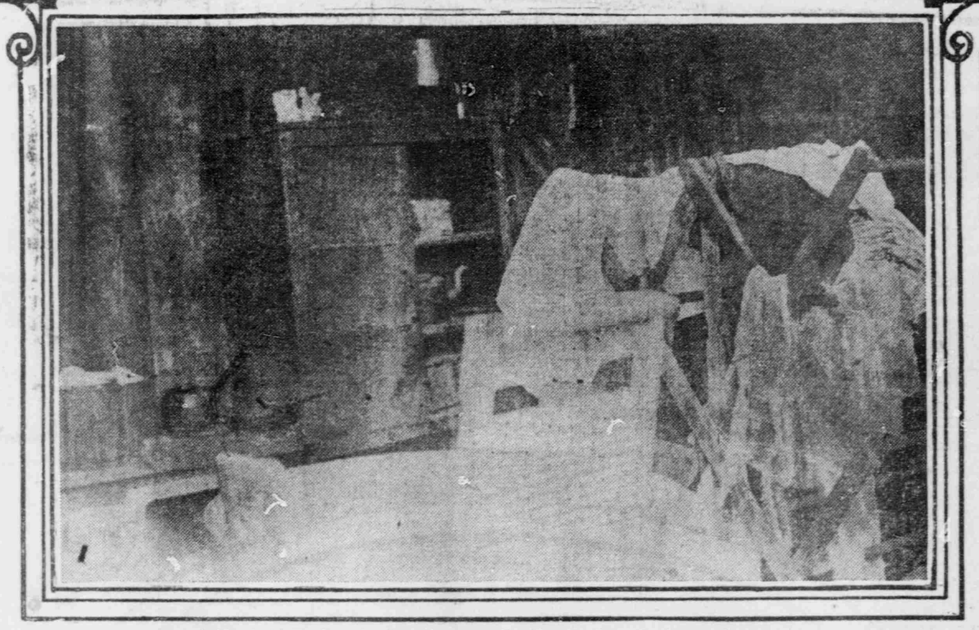
Humor and Pathos.

And just when we thought the last patient visited, and the nurse, footsore and weary, was ready to turn in her report, there came yet another call. This was a sick woman whose family increase had kept neck and neck with that of the "Basque family." Full as much light came in over the patches of soap boxes on the wall, and floor as through the one dirty window. It was a human habitation at the end of a blind alley upon which the landlord drew rent and future torture at a heavy rate. A burn was to be dressed, and the groans of the negro woman mingled with the cries of an infant and the fretful wails of other children in all stages of discomfort, coupled with no air, less food, and a mere frazzle of clothing for the whole family added to the dreariness of the scene.

"Soon daddy will come," moaned the sick woman, consolingly. And daddy did come. Tall, lank, black, and dirty beyond conception, but daddy was brave and daddy was kind. Daddy dug ditches and had brought a goodly part of the ditches home on his clothes, but the dozen youngsters didn't mind that. They seized his legs, his hands, his feet, and climbed all over him. As we dressed the awful burn on the woman's hands, daddy cut off hunks of bread and handed all around. This was oil on the troubled waters. Just as black-winged peace was settling on the hull of a home, a small urchin slipped through the broken bottom of a chair, his toenails dug his kinky hair, and ear-splitting yells rent the air. First daddy tried to move him by his head. No success. Then he laid hold of the heels, with no better luck. He frantically tried both ends at once, but the chair seemed contracting and the young prisoner expanding at a dreadful rate. The nurse stepped up, lifted the chair, and out from the bottom rolled the black bundle of woe.

It was a day of light and shade. There are those who are willing to be taught and many a life has been gently eased away by her teaching. There are those who toss on a sick pillow and bless her, and then there are the professional charity spoilers who think she does not do half for them that she is said to do. I concluded that unless she could use her material in a story she should have at least $5,000 a year for her time instead of $20 a month.

A list of the women who support the society reads like a "Behind the line" list from the White House at the beginning of a social season. While Miss Emily Tuckerman, daughter of Mrs. Lucius Tuckerman; Mary W. C. Bayard, and Anna A. Wilson are the incorporators, Mrs. Roosevelt, Mrs. Hay, Lady Durand, Mrs. Cowles, the President's sister; Mrs. L. Z. Leiter, Mrs. Robert W. Patterson, Mrs. Arnold Hague, Mrs. Brooks Adams, Mrs. G. C. Addison, Mrs. Audenreid, Mrs. Bates, Miss Boardman, Mrs. Hattie Blaine Beale, Mrs. T. M. Davis, Mrs. Elkins, Miss M. I. Ely, Hon. John G. Foster, Mrs. Gardiner Hubbard, Mrs. Eugene Hale, Mrs. Julian James, Mrs. Kean and the Misses Kean, mother and sisters of the New Jersey Senator; Mrs. Lodge, Mrs. Lowndes, Mrs. James McMillan, Mrs. McKim, Mrs. Wetmore, and a host of other society women contribute generously to the fund for maintaining the nurses. Even the Monday Evening Dance Club, composed of the most frivolous young people in Washington, became interested in these ministering angels to the unfortunate and contributed through Mrs. Postlethwaite nearly $150 to the fund last winter.



Even the Birds Desert the Roosts About the Homes of Some of Her Patients.

The "Baby Nurse" of the Corps Gives Special Attention to the Mothers and the Little Ones Just Come Into the World.

Steamships Wait for No Man, But Often They Are Caught

"THE old adage that 'time and tide wait for no man' will have to be changed to include steamships," remarked an old seafarer a few days ago, after a young couple had been placed aboard a tugboat for a chase down New York harbor to catch a vessel for which they had bought tickets and which they had missed.

"Every minute counts nowadays with a steamship captain, and he has orders not to hold his ship even for the President of the United States.

"People are not generally aware of this rule, and so passengers are frequently left on the pier. If they are lucky they may secure a fast tug and catch the boat before she has passed outside of Sandy Hook, but more often they have to accommodate themselves with later passage on another vessel.

To the Minute.

"When a steamship is scheduled to sail at 10 o'clock in the morning, it means that everything must be in readiness for her to leave promptly at that time. Her fires must be started in time to have a full head of steam, and tugboats are chartered to help her out of her pier on the stroke of the hour. To hold the ship for a time after she is ready means great expense to the company.

"There is the price of coal, which is not a small item, and when five or six tugs are chartered at $12 an hour to tugs are chartered at $12 an hour to swing the vessel out, the extra cost begins to mount up. Just suppose each steamship was held for fifteen minutes after her sailing time and you can see that the companies would lose thousands of dollars in a year.

"Chases down the bay after steamships are always exciting. If the steamship has not gone too far, if she has not worked up full speed, the late passenger has some chance, but otherwise he might as well save his money.

"Several years ago a coaster, I think it was the Yucatan, sailed for Havana and Mexico. There had been floods all through the Southwest, stalling the trains for weeks, and a young man who had very important business to transact in Mexico, had raced to New York with the hope of reaching Vera Cruz by the Yucatan.

Chase to Atlantic City.

"He appeared at the pier about twenty minutes after the vessel had sailed. He puffed and fumed for a moment, until some one advised him to try a tugboat. Accepting the suggestion, he rushed to a nearby pier, where several big fellows were tied up. To the captain of one of them he offered $150 if he caught the steamship.

"The captain accepted and the chase began. The tug swept down the bay, giving forth the greatest cloud of black smoke and shoving the water up in huge bunches of spray, so that her upper works were all wet.

The day was rather nasty. The clouds hung low, and a sea breeze brought in the fog gradually. The further down the tug went the thicker became the weather. At last the steamship disappeared in the fog bank, but the captain of the tug continued the chase, not willing to lose the amount offered if he succeeded.

Lost in Fog.

"Finally, just off the Atlantic Highlands, the fog became so bad that he was compelled to quit the chase and turn into shore. The young man was disappointed, and he asked if there was no other way of catching the vessel. The captain thought for a moment.

"'You might go ashore,' he said, 'and get a train down to Atlantic City. If the Yucatan has not passed before you get there you may be able to get another tug to take you out to her.'

"As this was the only hope left, the young man started off again. He managed to get a train at once, and by going in a roundabout way and making good connections he landed at Atlantic City two hours later. The fog had detained the Yucatan several hours, so that he managed to get aboard of her from another hired tug.

"I learned later that his having been twenty minutes late at the pier in New York had cost him more than the amount of his passage money on the Yucatan.

"Another miss I recall was that of an army officer stationed in Porto Rico and who was here on a leave of absence. His time had run out, and he booked on a steamship to return to his post. He missed her by an hour, so he reported to a superior at Governors Island and was told to be sure to get the next vessel. He also received a reprimand.

"A week later he again appeared at the pier—a few minutes after the vessel had left. You can imagine how he felt. He tore his hair, and went about muttering something about courts-martial and damning everything and everybody.

"Finally he got aboard a tug, and after paying the captain $75 he was taken down the bay and caught the vessel as she was passing out of the Hook. The tide was very low that day or he certainly would not have reached her.

An Elopement.

"I have a friend who wanted to marry a girl, but her folks objected. They planned to elope and waited until Saturday morning to do so, in order that they might catch a Cunard Line steamship and sail for Liverpool. They were married, and everything went well with them until they reached the pier. The steamship was just pulling out. The company agent put them aboard a tugboat, and several minutes later they were alongside the vessel. Then came the funny part.

"To get aboard the lovers had to go up a ladder from the deck of the tug. The young man went first and reached the steamship deck safely. Then the girl tried it. She was in the middle of the ladder when she tripped on her skirt, slipped over the side of the ladder and went tumbling into the water. Of course all was excitement. Life preservers were thrown to her, and the men on the tug went after her with boat hooks, while the pale and frightened husband stood tremoding on deck. At last she was fished out filled with salt water and with her gown ruined, but still ready to complete the elopement."